



January 31, 2014

To the Michigan House Committee, Regulatory Reform Chairman and members:

Board of Directors

I am writing in support of bill HB5163 introduced by Rep. Rob Verheulen from Kent County. I am the **staff veterinarian at the Binder Park Zoo in Battle Creek Michigan.**

Ron Slagell
Chair

At Binder Park Zoo, we have the opportunity to change the life of 80,000 children each year and over a quarter of a million people visit our zoo each year. Statewide, Michigan's zoos and aquariums serve more than 2 million people each year. From young to old, families, school groups, and tourists are all given a first class experience. For some of our guests this may be their first experience seeing exotic and unique animals and most of our guests will never have the chance to see these animals in the wild or in their indigenous habitats. We serve to nurture empathy, understanding and conservation of nature.

Ursula Case
First Vice Chair

Thom Unger
Second Vice Chair

Susan Baldwin
Susan Bedsole
Stephanie Hinman
Todd McDonald
Kurt Sherwood
Dr. Richard Snider

Large carnivores are some of the most popular animals to see at the zoo. They fascinate visitors with their powerful yet graceful movements. They instill awe and respect for the ever amazing animal kingdom. Unfortunately in Michigan, zoo visitors are prohibited by law from seeing the young offspring of the large carnivores currently in our zoos and our zoos are prohibited from contributing to ground breaking scientific endeavors focused on conservation of large carnivore species. That's because in Michigan, **It is illegal to breed large carnivores**, even in zoos participating in national and international conservation breeding programs. In 2000, the Legislature rightly amended the Large Carnivore Act to tighten up safety measures in the act. Unfortunately they mistakenly forgot to include an exemption that would allow accredited zoos to breed large carnivores.

Diane Thompson
President & CEO

Let's take a minute to look at the science behind national and international breeding programs:

- As an example, at the Binder Park Zoo in Battle Creek, we care for cheetahs and snow leopards. Both of these large carnivore species are considered endangered and suffer from poor reproductive success in captivity. Cheetahs demonstrate poor captive reproduction and many assisted reproductive technologies have been investigated to mitigate this problem.^{1,2} For snow leopards, poor male fertility has been discovered.³ Advanced scientific techniques such as artificial insemination, embryo collection, and semen assessment and cryopreservation are being adapted from domestic animals⁴; however Michigan zoos and scientists are significantly limited in our ability to contribute to this valuable work within the state of Michigan.
- At Binder Park Zoo we also house Mexican wolves, the rarest and most genetically distinct subspecies of grey wolves. We work closely with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and in the past we have contributed to the breeding program that has successfully reintroduced these animals to their native range. In fact, prior to the Large Carnivore Act's ban on breeding, a female wolf born at Binder Park Zoo was the first female to successfully breed after release into the wild. Our current contributions are limited to preservation of genetic samples since we are not allowed to breed these endangered carnivores at this time.
- Accredited Michigan zoos may be looked over for caring for certain large carnivore species due to the limitations imposed by the Large Carnivore Act. Giant Pandas one example of such a species. I had the opportunity to work with these animals the Smithsonian Institution's National Zoo in



Washington DC. The Chinese government sends these bears to zoos around the world as a part of a robust scientific conservation program authorized by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.⁵ Due to extremely poor reproduction of this species, an extremely important part of this conservation program focuses on forwarding the science of reproduction techniques to preserve these animals. Under the current law Michigan zoos would likely be looked over to house these animals.

With our focus on science and conservation of these rare and often endangered species, the current law creates a gap that imposes limitations on the ability for our Michigan zoos to fully participate in programs that will ensure the survival of some of these large carnivore species, protect distinctive and unique features by maintaining the purity of their bloodlines, and provide a complete zoo experience enjoyed by visitors in nearly every other state. Accredited facilities participating in these scientifically based breeding programs may also lose their large carnivores to zoos in other states if Michigan's laws regarding the breeding of large carnivores in these establishments are not remedied.

We would like your help in correcting this oversight by a previous legislature. Rep. Rob Verheulen from Kent County has introduced HB5163 that will remedy this situation. His bill would provide fair and prudent standards that if met, would allow zoos to participate in a science based cooperative conservation breeding program for large carnivores.

As a member of the House Regulation and Reform Committee, please vote for this bill and assist in its passage in the House. Please don't hesitate to contact me to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

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1. Crosier AE et al. Increasing age influences uterine integrity, but not ovarian function or oocyte quality, in the cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*). *Biology of Reproduction*. 2011 Aug;85(2):243-53.
2. Pukazhenthi B et al. Challenges in cryopreserving endangered mammal spermatozoa: morphology and the value of acrosomal integrity as markers of cryo-survival. *Society of Reproduction and Fertility Supplement*. 2007;65:433-46.
3. Snow leopard (*Uncia uncia*) Species Survival Plan data.
4. Comizzoli P et al. Advances in reproductive science for wild carnivore conservation. *Reproduction in Domestic Animals*. 2009 Jul;44 Suppl 2:47-52.
5. United States Fish and Wildlife Service data.